

Testimony for

HB 368

Jodie Foley, State Archivist

Montana Historical Society

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. For the record, my name is Jodie Foley; I serve as the State Archivist at the Montana Historical Society.

Montana has a long legacy of preserving its history, beginning with the creation of the Montana Historical Society at the very first territorial legislature in 1865. A significant part of that history is the records of this body, the Montana state legislature. The Historical Society collects and preserves all of the permanent records of the legislature, dating back to that first gathering almost a century and a half ago. Today legislative records are among the most requested items in our State Archives.

As the State Archives, we are mandated to collect, preserve, and provide access to the permanent records of Montana's state government. House Bill 368 would create gavel-to-gavel coverage of the legislative proceedings, thus providing digital access to an invaluable resource for current and future researchers trying to determine legislative intent. In addition to providing broader public access to these proceedings, House Bill 368 will create a new type of record of Montana's legislative assembly. Whereas the permanent records of previous legislatures have consisted of paper records and audio-cassette tapes, formats which the Historical Society is equipped to deal with—this bill would allow the creation of digital records—records which are no less important but require specialized work to preserve.

While we are pleased that these new records will be created, the State Archives is not currently equipped to work with records in digital format, and thus not able to carry out our mandate to collect, preserve and provide access to these permanent records.

With funding from this bill, we intend to hire an Electronic Records Specialist; someone with specialized knowledge to develop and oversee a program to properly care for, maintain, and provide access to these digital recordings for generations to come. This person would work through the State Archives to coordinate with the Legislative Services Division, their broadcasting contractor TVMT, and the Information Technology Services Division to ensure the proper care and preservation of the digital video/audio recordings of Montana's legislative assembly. Any remaining funds will be used for the purchase, maintenance, and upgrading of hardware and software needed for the preservation of these records.

Given the significance of the work done by the Legislature, and therefore the records it creates, the Historical Society is pleased to see a bill promoting the creation of digital video coverage of the legislature, as well as the establishment of a program to care

for the resulting recordings to ensure their use by Montanans well into the future. The Montana Historical Society supports House Bill 368.

Thank you.